

**Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism  
Interim Progress Report  
March 30, 2006**

The Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism (ACOSP) was created by vote of the Faculty Senate on November 3, 2005, and two organizational meetings were held in December. Curt Conner and Stan Hertzbach agreed to serve as co-chairs, and two subcommittees were formed. Catharine Porter, University Ombudsperson, chairs the subcommittee on Policy and Procedure, and Donna LeCourt, Director of the Writing Program, chairs the subcommittee on Teaching. Anne C. Moore, Associate Director for User Services, is the liaison with the Library and software vendors. Reports from the two subcommittees are incorporated below. The ACOSP membership includes one graduate student and three undergraduate students.

In December, the Library was approaching the end of a one-year trial period with plagiarism detection software vendor Turnitin, and a license for CY 2006 was being negotiated. ACOSP immediately had to address a variety of issues to advise the Library how to proceed with Turnitin. The University now has a one-year license with Turnitin, and a one-year trial with competitive vendor MyDropBox, identified by ACOSP.

In early February 2006, ACOSP held telephone-web meetings with representatives of both Turnitin and MyDropBox. In both cases, their software compares student papers with sources on the internet, in subscription databases, in proprietary databases, and in a database of student papers. They provide a color-coded "originality report," which displays sections of text with significant matches to these sources. Each source is identified, and its matching text can be displayed. They do not determine if there is plagiarism, nor do they grade student papers. Those decisions are left to the instructor.

In the standard Turnitin license, signed by the University, student papers from all subscribing schools are commingled in a common database. This raises ethical concerns and concerns about FERPA, copyright, and intellectual property laws, about which Associate University Counsel Brian Burke expressed concern. ACOSP discussed issues related to the common database in two meetings, and voted to adopt a model in which UMass submissions are segregated in a separate database, independent of the common Turnitin database. Turnitin has agreed to provide this for the remainder of the current license, and MyDropBox already operates in such a manner. This protects students' rights and will be easier to implement because it avoids the above concerns.

The subcommittee on Policy and Procedure reviewed the proposed revisions to the Academic Honesty Policy (AHP) presented by Mary Wardwell and Catharine Porter in the Ombuds Office. Members offered further refinement of the revised AHP policy and developed a guide that faculty can use when a case of dishonesty has occurred. The AHP will be reviewed by the Deputy Provost and the Dean of Students. When completed, it will be easier to follow.

As part of the AHP revision, a new system of reporting dishonesty is being addressed. The goal of the Committee is to institutionalize a system that is fair to all students and acceptable to all faculty members.

The teaching subcommittee has met four times and is working on developing instructional support for faculty and students around questions of plagiarism. Specifically, the committee is developing a "plagiarism" statement that faculty can insert

into syllabi, developing a statement around the use of technology (Turnitin or MyDropBox) to offer faculty advice, and recommending that the Center for Teaching collect “best practices” from across campus on teaching issues related to plagiarism. The latter includes information on designing assignments, cultural differences in the treatment of intellectual property, and discipline-specific materials on research ethics and intellectual property concerns.

The teaching subcommittee is also seeking materials that can be of use to students, particularly a “plagiarism tutorial” for students, and is considering recommendations about programs in the residence halls and through the Writing Center that could help disseminate information more widely and support student learning more effectively. To help guide the committee’s work, committee members are currently undertaking a phone-survey of faculty who participated in the Turnitin.com trial last spring to gain more information on how faculty currently view plagiarism, their response to it, and the instructional support they need.

On April 11, the Library will host a Faculty Reception from 11:30 to 1:30 in the Learning Commons, featuring a tour, a light lunch, and demonstrations of Turnitin and MyDropBox. ACOSP encourages all teaching staff to come and learn about these valuable tools. It is our opinion that the consistent and uniform use of these tools is efficient, and is the most fair and unbiased way to check student submissions for originality of content. These tools can also be used as an aide in teaching about plagiarism.

The committee needs many more faculty and instructors using Turnitin and MyDropBox this year, in order to gather enough data to understand the nature and extent of plagiarism on our campus. Only through faculty participation and input can we gain sufficient experience to enable ACOSP to make recommendations regarding plagiarism at the University.

ACOSP will continue to work with the Library during the current Turnitin license and the concurrent MyDropBox trial. The two subcommittees will continue their work of developing materials, and will present their results to the full committee. In the fall of this year, ACOSP will make a recommendation to the Faculty Senate regarding which, if any, plagiarism detection service should be used. Other recommendations related to the charge to the committee will be made as they are ready.

ACOSP has proposed an addition to the *Academic Regulations*, to make clear that tools such as these may be used to address plagiarism. The Senate will vote on this later in the semester.

Stan and Curt, for ACOSP

**Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism**

Jane Baran	John Kleschinsky	Catharine Porter
W. Curtis Conner	Donna LeCourt	Richard Rogers
Catherine Dimmitt	Susan McKenna	Sigrid Schmalzer
Copper Giloth	Anne C. Moore	Richard Senatore
Judith Goodenough	Jonathan Moreno	Patricia Stowell
Stanley S. Hertzbach	Stephen Olbrys	James Wagstaff
	Mathew Ouellett	